



**BENEATH A
STEEL
SKY**



Virgin

Dave Gibbons

An Earth-bound god worshipped by a generation of kids brought up on the classic graphics of *2000AD*, this cult comic book novelist has now turned his hand to Amiga games.



When Dave Gibbons walked into *Amiga Format*'s offices there was no great fanfare. Modest and unassuming, he's extremely enthusiastic about his work and genuinely excited about getting involved with Revolution Software for *Beneath A Steel Sky*. Ask him about his work and the words pour out of him, like the blood from one of Judge Dredd's victims. He's got a lot of stories to tell and he tells them very well. It's time to introduce yourself to the *Watchmen*, it's time to meet Dave Gibbons...

“ I've always loved comics since I was a kid - I remember getting my first Superman comic when I was about seven, and thinking 'Cor, this is great, I could do this, I could tell these stories'. And I've still got that comic; I'm a bit of a fan and a collector.

Basically, while I was growing up it seemed like a wild dream that I could draw comics for a living, so I went down other paths (I qualified as a surveyor) until I was in my early 20s when the whole thing of comic collecting seemed to take off. I came across some fanzines and I got some work printed in them. Then an art agent saw my work and got me some more. Basically it started from there - about 20 years ago - and I've been drawing comics professionally ever since.

I guess it was kind of luck. I've never had any desire to paint or draw anything just for the sake of it - I've always wanted to get a message across, you know, create something for people to see. That's always been the thing that's driven me. Traditionally comics have been aimed at an unsophisticated audience, but they don't have to be - you can do things with comics that have all the depth, subtlety and range that any art form has.

The thing about comics is that they've always been a bit of a downgraded art form; it was what people were doing until they got a proper job. But there was a generation of us - people who really loved comics and wanted to do nothing else. Half of us hadn't gone to art school and were qualified in other areas, but we just taught ourselves. I went to life-drawing classes, copied other people's work, read books and practised.

One of the things that really moved us on

was a comic called *2000AD* - a lot of us congregated and worked on that, all trying to out do each other. I worked on it for the first two or three years, and after that sporadically for a year or so. I think *2000AD* put British comics on the map - it broke the mould. The ground had been laid by other comics such as *Action* and *Battle*, but going for longer stories and more impact with larger graphics, and also coming up with Judge Dredd, really helped *2000AD* make its mark.

It brought us all together and introduced things like credits - up until then the artist's names used to be whitened out because publishers thought it would stop the illusion kids had of the story if they knew it was created by an artist. In fact, by having the artist's name on their work meant that kids became real fans of some one in particular and could follow their work.

A lot of people who started reading *2000AD* when they were eight years old have read it ever since. It can hold an adult audience - there are about 100,000 people who will buy *2000AD* no matter what, and I don't see why it won't continue to be published until *2000AD*.

Now is an exciting time for comics because the audience has changed. It used to be a mass audience but now it's a big specialist audience, so within that there's the market for a lot of different things. There's some talented people working on comics, who I'm lucky enough to work with, people like Frank Miller and Alan Moore.

I did a comic book called *Watchmen* which was quite well received and at one time there was going to be a movie and a computer game based on *Watchmen*. Well, I ended up borrowing

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THE OLD MAN
WAS TRYING TO
TELL THE FUTURE,
LOOKING FOR
PICTURES IN THE
CAMPFIRE...

EVIL...
OHMM, I SEE
EVIL...

EVIL,
BORN DEEP
BENEATH THE
CITY... FAR
FROM THE
LIGHT OF
DAY...



I SEE IT
GROWING SAFE
BELOW A SKY OF
STEEL... SCHEMING
IN THE DARK
...GATHERING
STRENGTH...

AND
NOW...OHMM...
NOW THE
EVIL
SPREADS!

IT SENDS
DEADLY FEELERS
OVER THE LAND
ABOVE...

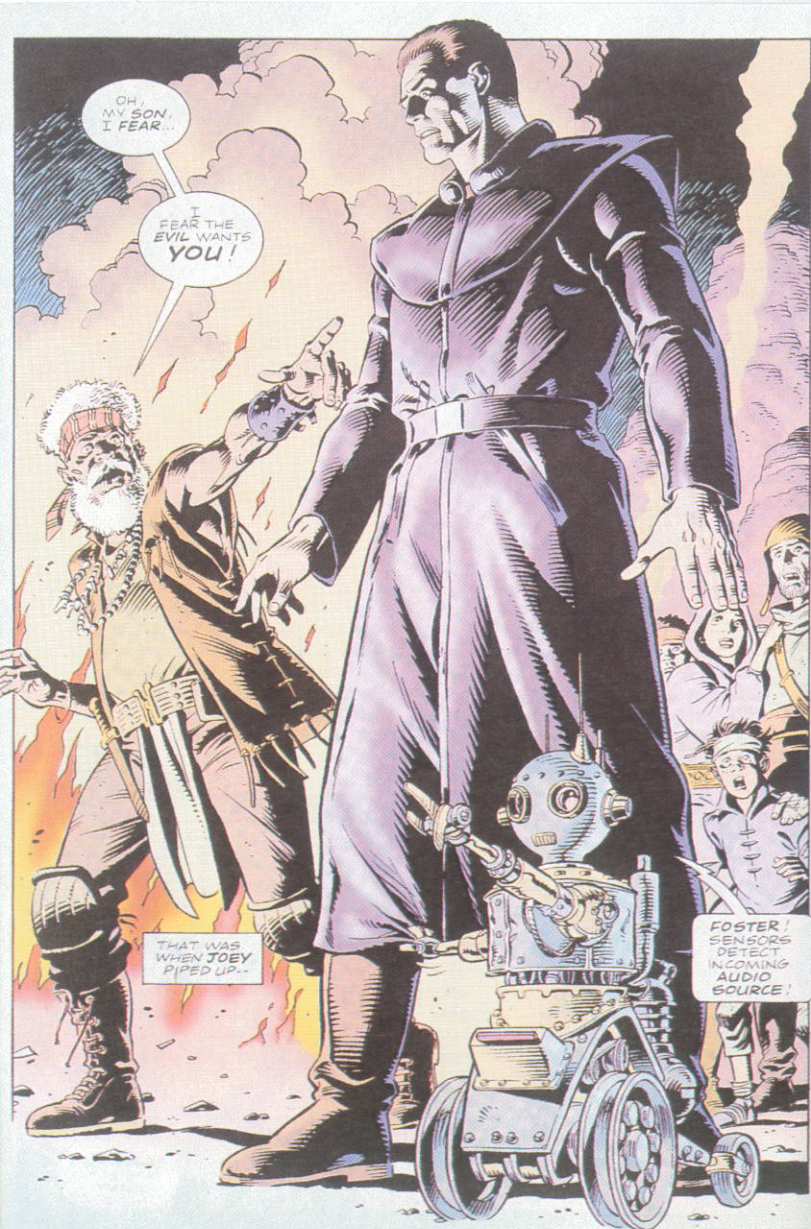
ACROSS
THE GAP,
REACHING
TOWARDS THIS
VERY PLACE!

I'D SEEN
HIM DO THIS
A HUNDRED
TIMES, BUT
I HUMOURED
HIM.

AFTER ALL,
HE'D BEEN
LIKE A FATHER
TO ME.



AND
WHAT DOES
THIS EVIL
WANT
HERE?



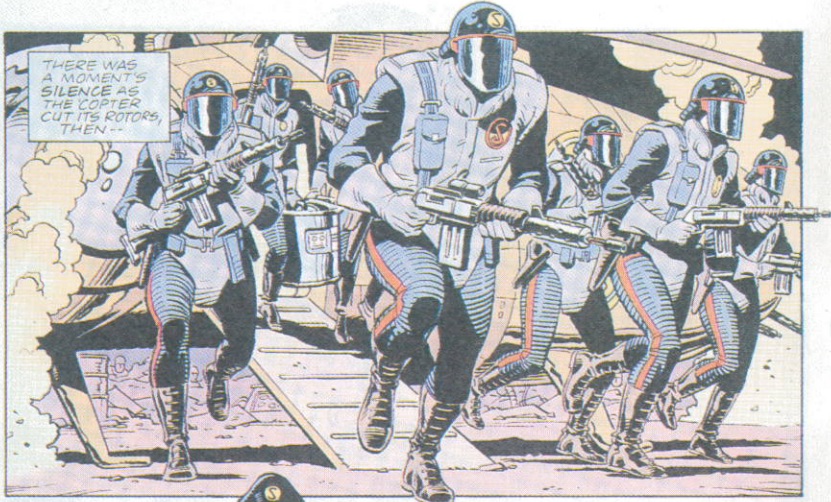
OH,
MY SON,
I FEAR...

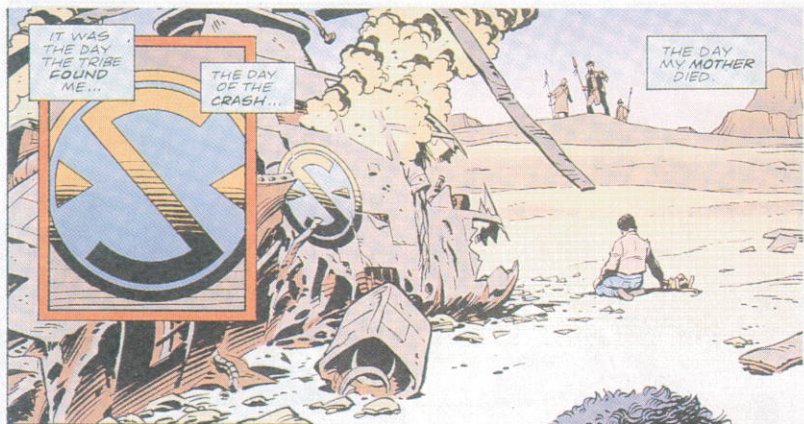
I
FEAR THE
EVIL WANTS
YOU!

THAT WAS
WHEN JOEY
PIPED UP...

FOSTER!
SENSORS
DETECT
INCOMING
AUDIO
SOURCE!

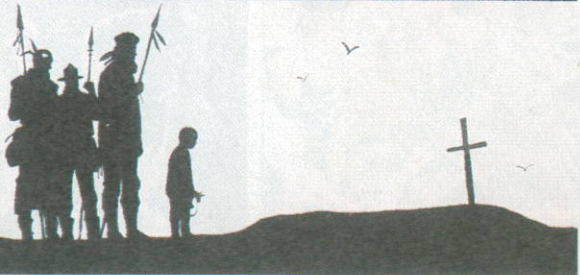




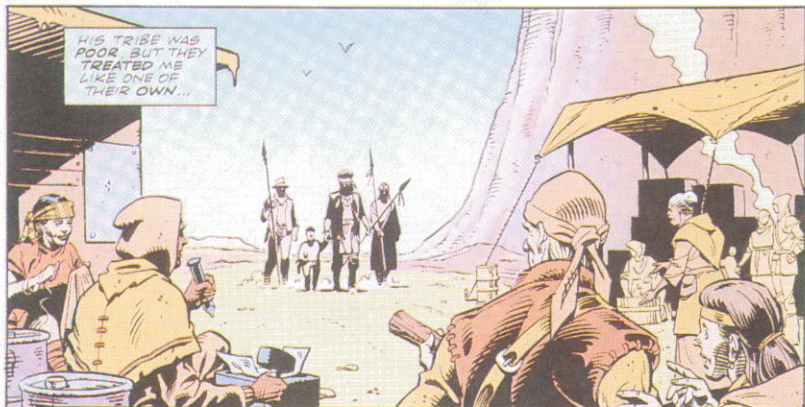


AS HE PATCHED ME UP, THE OLD MAN HAD GENTLY EXPLAINED THAT THERE WAS NO WAY BACK INTO THE CITY...

AND I ALREADY KNEW THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO FOR MOTHER.



HIS TRIBE WAS POOR, BUT THEY TREATED ME LIKE ONE OF THEIR OWN...



I LEARNED HOW TO SURVIVE HUNTING IN THE WASTELAND THEY CALLED THE GAP.

AND SCAVENGING FROM THE CITY DUMPS.



AS THE YEARS PASSED, I FORGOT MY LIFE IN THE CITY

HAH!

DISCOVERED NEW TALENTS...

I'M YOUR SKIZZ FRIEND... CALL ME SKIZZ JOEY



AND GOT A SECOND NAME.

THIS IS WHAT WE'LL CALL YOU, NOW YOU'VE COME OF AGE SON! WE FOUND YOU, FOSTERED YOU...

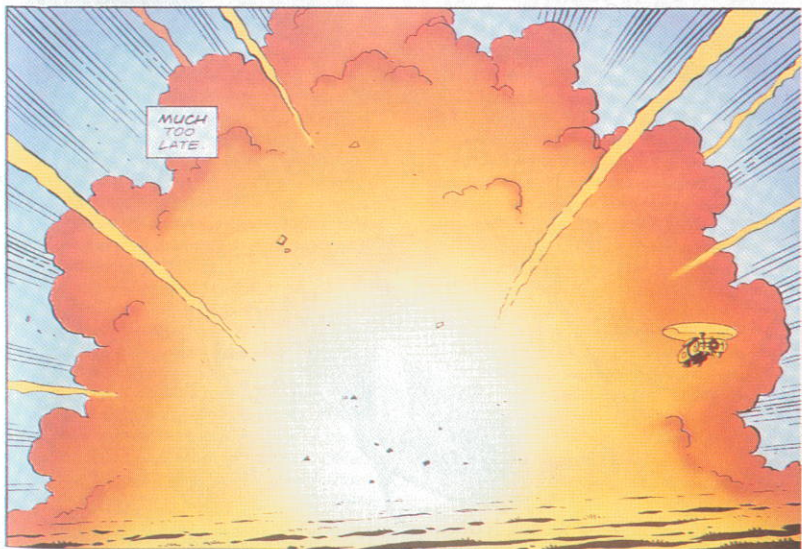
SO THAT MAKES YOU ROBERT FOSTER!



...WASTED ENOUGH TIME!

GIVE US THE RUNAWAY OR WE'LL SHOOT EVERYONE... STARTING WITH YOU GRANDAD!

THE OLD MAN HAD BEEN RIGHT, FOR ONCE...





ALL I
COULD
DO WAS
WAIT.

JUST LIKE ON A
HUNT. JUST LIKE
THE OLD MAN
TAUGHT ME.

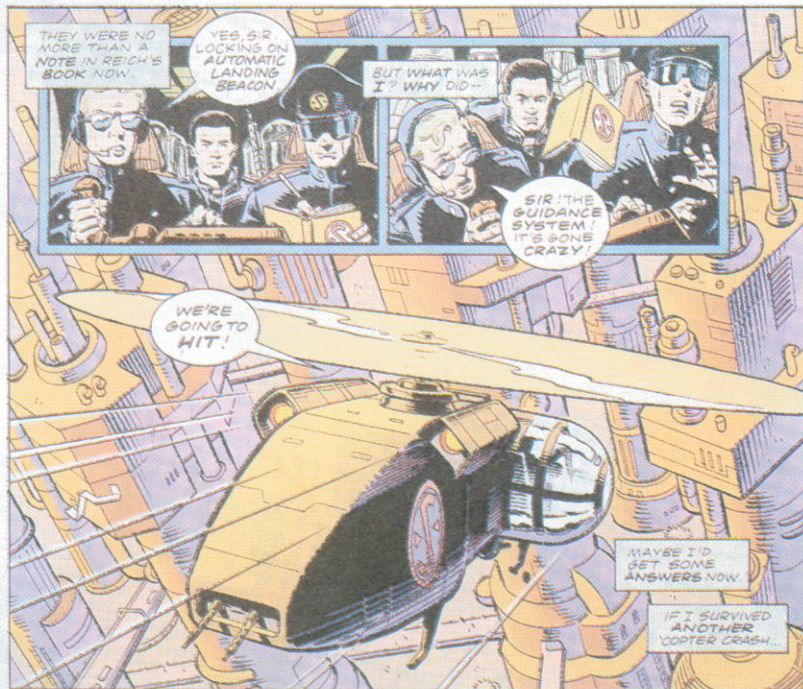
WAIT...
AND BE
READY.



IT WAS DAWN WHEN
WE REACHED THE CITY.

LAND IN THE
CENTRAL SECURITY
COMPOUND.

A DAWN MY
TRIBE WOULD
NEVER SEE



THEY WERE NO
MORE THAN A
NOTE IN REICH'S
BOOK NOW.

YES, SIR
LOCKING ON
AUTOMATIC
LANDING
BEACON

BUT WHAT WAS
I? WHY DID--

SIR! THE
GUIDANCE
SYSTEM!
IT'S GONE
CRAZY!

WE'RE
GOING TO
HIT!

MAYBE I'D
GET SOME
ANSWERS NOW.

IF I SURVIVED
ANOTHER
COPTER CRASH...

an Amiga to do some computer graphics and through that I met the people who were going to be doing the Watchmen game. I also met Charles Cecil and he was very interested in using my talents at Active. Later on, when he was forming a company of his own, he contacted me and I got more and more involved in doing *Beneath a Steel Sky*.

The point at which I joined was just before *Lure of The Temptress* was released, a kind of dungeons and dragons type game, and he thought it would be a good idea to make the second game to fit a well known genre - a *Blade Runner*, a sort of future dystopia.

I was sent a rudimentary outline of what could happen and I then wrote a much longer story with lots of new characters and scenarios. They then added further to it - a kind of collaboration. At the end of the day it's hard to say exactly who was responsible for everything. I actually designed several of the sprites using *DPaint* - I didn't think it was fair to just produce finished artwork of everything, which I found very interesting and educational.

Obviously, *DPaint* is a comparatively stone-age way of working and the sprites I did for *Steel Sky* were quite rudimentary because they were for a game that was going to appear on a certain type of machine. But I found that a challenge - trying to get a character's personality and expression in a face that was maybe seven pixels wide and nine pixels high in a very limited palette. But I actually found the restrictions - and of course the instant ability to change things - great to work with. And of course, things are much quicker especially with colour work.

I certainly hope to do more of this sort of work in the future, now that I've got more of an idea of what I can do and how it all works. Seeing my characters walking about and talking, and doors I've drawn opening and shutting is just amazing.

We've been talking already about what input I might have in future games, or a sequel to *Beneath The Steel Sky*. It might not strictly be a sequel, but it might be a shared world thing where it would be an adventure which would take place in another part of the world that we've established and maybe have characters we've already met appearing in it. This is a thing that works very well in comics, and in games it gives the games player a feeling that there's this

vast world that all makes sense. So that will be a very interesting thing to do.

I will keep up my work in comics - it's my medium, but other things will come up which I want to do. Doing different things means they can feed off each other - I've already had some ideas for comics which I've got from working with game design. Probably, I'd like to split my time three ways between writing comics, drawing comics and working on computer games.

The computer is a sort of mutual medium - you can do anything with it and it will probably be the form of story telling that takes over from print. Things are moving towards the point where interactive stories will just be another kind of story. Although what Revolution Software have done with *Beneath the Steel Sky* is very state-of-the-art, we're still at a very primitive stage of things and we're looking at the technology and we're amazed by things.

It's like at the very early stages of cinema when people would just look at a film of people walking down the street - once all the technology gets sorted out so that you can do anything, that's when the true creativity will come. When you can say to an artist here's a thing that's adaptable and just as easy-to-use as a paintbrush, when they'll be able to work without thinking about the restrictions of technology, that's when it will truly happen. It's a very exciting field and it's nice to be able to be thinking about it at this stage, and hopefully in some small way to be able to contribute to the way things develop.

Today, a lot of colouring in comics is already done on computers. The black and white artwork is scanned and it's coloured on screen and film is output directly. I'm investigating this set-up, because if I had it I could sit in my room, type the script on a WP program, draw the artwork, colour it, and output at the end of the day the thing that a printer could produce a comic from. You would have complete control.

However, to actually draw things on computer, drawing freehand with a mouse doesn't feel quite right. You haven't got that feeling of contact. Until technology improves even further I think I would draw the outline and then scan it in. But that's something I'm pursuing - it's the way forward. You never know, maybe in couple of years you will be able to pick up a comic that's been written by me, drawn by me, output by me and perhaps even printed by me!





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